

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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December 28, 2005

Emily Ferry
Alaska Transportation Priorities Project
419 6th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Steve Cleary
AKPIRG
419 6th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Rec. 12/29/05
SW
(see 119)
Reiter

Dear Ms. Ferry and Mr. Cleary:

This letter is in response to your letter of December 13th to Governor Frank Murkowski regarding transportation projects. As Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, I am responding on the governor's behalf.

Your letter, the attached "Fix It First Fact Sheet," your earlier press release and the 24-page spreadsheet you distributed with the press release are, regrettably, in error in how they purport to compare this administration's proposed transportation spending with previous plans.

In your spreadsheet, you have apparently tried to depict a vast number of projects pushed off the new draft Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) by the presence of two large bridge projects. This is misleading and does the public a great disservice. The new draft STIP is out for public comment through December 31st. But a person relying on the faulty information put out by ATPP would be hard pressed to make a meaningful comment about the STIP.

No author or anyone associated with the writing of the ATPP report ever checked with the department to determine the actual status of the projects it depicts, or whether certain projects might have been accelerated, or funded in another manner. In addition to the lack of fact checking, there are numerous other deficiencies in your report.

First, the "before" document used in the comparison was DOT&PF's major amendment #8, adopted in January, 2005, which included a column with project totals for funding needed beyond 2006. Typically, substantial amounts are noted in this column in the STIP, for prospective funding of projects in the "out years." This is to give the public a picture of where DOT&PF wants to go with the STIP, if funding becomes available.

This prospective funding column was used by ATPP to produce a very large number to compare to the new draft STIP. It would be analogous to hoping to win the lottery, and then when you didn't, complaining about your loss of income.

Second, there are quite a few projects that received their funding in 2005, and no longer need to be shown in the new draft STIP. Yet, they are portrayed as projects being delayed beyond 2009.

Third, many projects in the new draft STIP have seen their projected costs reduced due to savings or efficiencies identified in the development process, yet the savings are portrayed as delayed or cancelled spending.

Fourth, DOT&PF continues to follow a regulation adopted in early 2002, which favors STIP spending toward local communities, at the expense of the state's main network of National Highway System routes. This is in contrast with almost every other state, where the lion's share of the expense of local, community and county roads is funded through local taxes. This extra allocation to local roads is not even mentioned by ATPP; instead, you would have the public believe the state is under-serving local needs, when the opposite is true when compared to other state transportation agencies' use of their STIP funds.

In summary, at best the spreadsheet demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of how the STIP process works, and how projects move onto or off of the STIP.

Again, your ATPP report distorts the facts, and creates confusion and discontent among Alaskans and will not help them in making meaningful public comments on the new draft STIP. We are confident that the STIP process is a time-tested, open public process that provides opportunities for the public to be involved in the setting of priorities for transportation spending. It is unfortunate that you and your associates, who are opposed to large, forward-looking projects, would distort the public process.

Sincerely,



Mike Barton
Commissioner

cc: Linda Hay, Special Staff Assistant, Office of the Governor